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Espionage for fun and profit

THE SAGA of the Walker clan grows darker. The latest now is the news that brother Arthur found a job, at John's behest, for the sole purpose of obtaining information to be sold to the Soviets.

At the same time, the brooding grows over the "new" breed of spies. As did Newsweek last week, now does Time magazine — among others — find disturbing the "shifting motives for betraying one's country" among spies who "care little for politics."

An assistant attorney general in the Justice Dept. has been moved to suggest special deterrents suited to this era when espionage is committed mainly for money, not for ideological reasons.

So the word is out now, officially: our traitors are not the traitors they used to be. (Where have all the flowers gone?)

We have been offered reasons galore for this phenomenon. But let us digress for a moment: to ask what need have we of spies who are idealists when we have loyal citizens of the character of, say, Kurt Vonnegut?

A recent traveler to Poland,



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novelist Vonnegut delivered remarks in the course of an interview with dissident writers and Solidarity leaders (for the recording of which we are indebted to the New York Times Op-Ed page). In these, Vonnegut noted that the world interest in Solidarity was a "selfish interest."

For example, the government of the United States, he explained, is interested in Solidarity "because it means that the Soviet Union has enemies here." (Translation: the U.S. is interested in Solidarity for its own ignoble, which is to say militaristic, reasons).

Whereas, Vonnegut went on to confide, his selfishness, like that of traveling companion William Styron, is "of a different kind." And this selfishness, Vonnegut now selflessly owned up, was derived from their wish "to learn

about the human condition."

Now Vonnegut is, of course, not a man who would betray his nation for money. Still, this little exchange in Poland, in which Vonnegut troubled to establish with such care the comparison between his motives and the baser ones of his government, should serve to remind us, despite these days of darkest doubt, that there still exists our rich resource of political ideologues, innately hostile to this government, this system, and all its works and deeds.

We hear from them every day.

Return, now, to the haunting question: how account for the lack of political idealism in the new generation of spies.

We have heard not a few reasons offered these last few weeks, all pointing one way and another to the cause already held accountable for virtually all ills and injustices plaguing our society namely materialism.

So the recent converts to espionage are, it is explained again and again, greedy for cash, addicted to high living, cars, girls, the fast lane and so on.

Had we not all been instructed so unceasingly in the damage, the injustices and the impoverishment that are the inevitable consequences of the materialistic system in which we live, we would now of course be less prepared to understand the sad phenomenon which our analysts of the scene have now so clearly presented to us: the surrender (yet another) to the profit motive of a once high-minded calling.

(Can it be long before our traitors join union leaders, teachers and doctors on the long list of those whom peo-

ple sigh over today as lacking the integrity they used to have?)

The truth of this matter is, of course, nowhere so simple as these answers.

There have been, long before this, traitors who betrayed their country mainly for profit; others who did so essentially for reasons of ideology, and the great many who did so for both these reasons, as for a host of others.

The Rosenbergs did not commit treason for money, but they received a good deal of it from the Soviets, nevertheless, for having so done.

Burgess and Maclean, the British spies, were devoted Communists, for whom a life of treason provided any number of gains and enticements in addition to the ideological.

We shall not know for some time to come the harm done by John Walker and his enlistees in treason should the charges against him be proved.

It will be even longer, then, before we can discover the reasons for the making of so single-minded a traitor: for it takes a special breed of citizen, even one obsessed with greed, to betray his nation.

Not to recognize this — to find the answers in mere greed and profit — is to reduce the monstrous to the ordinary, the wildly aberrant to the nearly normal.

In this there is, next to the loss of our secrets themselves, the greatest danger of all.